

I Don't Really See (Why We Can't Go On As Three) by Rubyrazor

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Summary:

“We need to talk.” Jonathon demanded looking annoyed and crossing his arms.

“Um hi? This is my car man.” Steve said, confused as to why Jonathon Byers, the most shy, self-conscious, weird kid (who was possibly dating his girlfriend? Ex-girlfriend?) was suddenly ripping the door off of his car and demanding shit.

In which Steve Harrington isn't sure where he stands with Nancy, doesn't understand why Jonathon wants to help him in his photography class so badly, and hopes these emotions he's feeling aren't what he thinks they are.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

Steve Harrington knows he can't avoid Nancy Wheeler forever and he's 99% sure they aren't dating anymore. He's also 100% sure he's going to fail photography if he doesn't accept Jonathon's offer to help.

Steve Harrington was 99% sure his relationship with Nancy Wheeler was over. 99% because there really hadn't been much time to talk about it after everything had happened and also because he'd been 100% avoiding her at all costs. Of course he was highly aware this wouldn't achieve anything besides likely pushing her further away than she already was but he just couldn't.

The first time he'd tried had been before the.... events that took place. He'd walked to her door, flowers in hand, reciting lines he'd written down then memorized. But suddenly Dustin was there ripping the flowers from his hands and demanding a ride. After that everything moved so quickly and for a while it didn't matter that he talk to Nancy because his kids needed him and Jonathon needed her.

The second time had been during the middle school Snow Ball. He knew Nancy was chaperoning and he'd thought about walking Dustin in himself and then trying to slip her away to talk for a moment. But Dustin needed to look cool, which didn't involve Steve walking him in and possibly causing a scene.

So he told himself that he'd talk to her the next day. Then that day went by. Then the next, and the next, and the next, and soon it had been a week and he couldn't bring himself to face her. He felt so guilty but what could he say? That he was so broken over the fact that Nancy didn't love him that he couldn't stand to see her? No, no, he may as well just avoid that situation entirely and pretend like nothing had ever happened.

Unfortunately they went to the same school which made avoiding her difficult. He'd planned everything from getting to school just in time

to run to class, to what hallways to avoid when. It was working fairly well. She had only spotted him once when he'd miscalculated and turned down the English hallway. There she was standing with Jonathon at the end of the hall.

He'd frozen like a deer in headlights, begging his legs to start working again so he could walk away as quickly (and nonchalantly) as possible. Except he didn't move and Nancy looked up and caught his gaze. A flurry of emotions passed over her face but before she could say or do anything Steve turned and ran. He saw the door to the photography classroom open and the lights off and slipped inside. He just needed to breathe.

Ugh he was so stupid! All he had to do was talk to her like a normal human. He'd never had a problem with confrontation or talking about relationships before now. Somehow this was different and he had absolutely no idea why. They'd both seemed so happy. The way Nancy's smiled when she was with him and the way Jonathon's eyes lit up. He just couldn't.

The next day he drove up to school late again. At this point he was kind of surprised that he hadn't been given detention for the amount of tardies he had piling up. As he grabbed his backpack Jonathon yanked open the door and flung himself down in the passenger seat. Steve blinked. Jonathon Byers was in Steve Harrington's car and suddenly seemed much bolder than usual.

"We need to talk." Jonathon demanded looking annoyed and crossing his arms.

"Um hi? This is my car man." Steve said, confused as to why Jonathon Byers, the most shy, self-conscious, weird kid (who was possibly dating his girlfriend? Ex-girlfriend?) was suddenly ripping the door off of his car and demanding shit.

"Yeah.... sorry," Jonathon paused, "I just wanted to talk to you I guess." His shoulders relaxed slightly and instead of looking annoyed he looked mostly uncomfortable. There was the Jonathon that Steve knew.

There was a long pause.

“Okay?” Steve asked gesturing for Jonathon to say something.

Jonathon looked like he was lost in thought and having trouble piecing words together. “I think you should talk to Nancy.” He finally said.

Steve stared at him. Sure he knew he needed to talk to Nancy but not in a million years had he expected Jonathon-fucking-Byers to tell him that.

Jonathon shook his head, “Look man she really wants to talk to you. She’s upset that you’ve been avoiding her.”

Steve felt a sudden spike of anger flare up, “Yeah well I thought she was with you now so what’s the point? Why would she want to talk to me?”

Jonathon sighed and leaned his head against the headrest, “It’s....complicated...and it’s complicated between you and Nancy too so maybe you should talk to her.”

Steve groaned and shook his head.

“She misses you and she really does want to talk to you.” Jonathon said softly.

Steve’s heart raced as he thought about talking to her, about finally hearing the words, “I don’t love you” coming from Nancy’s mouth. It had already hurt the first time when she called their relationship bullshit. But this time it would be from a sober Nancy who had made up her mind about him.

“Okay whatever I’ll think about it. Now get out of my car man we’re late for class!” Steve said waving Jonathon out.

It turned out that Steve Harrington did indeed have enough tardies for a detention, which is how he found himself sitting in the library after school absolutely bored out of his mind. He sat there, homework on the table, not doing any of it just staring off into the distance berating himself for once again not talking to Nancy. A

tapping at the door pulled Steve out of his reverie.

Steve's heart started racing when he saw Nancy standing at the window waving at him. The teacher who had the unfortunate and equally boring job of supervising them hadn't seemed to notice the intrusion into this clearly very important detention time where almost every student was sleeping. Nancy motioned again for Steve to join her. Steve straightened up in his chair, raised his hand, and cleared his throat. That didn't seem to phase the teacher who was still staring down at her grading robotically marking each paper.

"Um excuse me." He whispered breaking the silence. She just kept grading, "Ma'am."

The teacher looked up quickly, "What?!" Steve thought she must be extremely stressed given the amount of papers piled up on the ungraded side and the annoyance in her voice.

"I just need to use the restroom." He explained.

"Yeah, go, sign out when you leave." She waved already back to intently grading papers.

By the time Steve left the library he thought he was going to throw up.

"What the hell Steve?!" yep there it was, the response he knew he would get and the one he definitely deserved, "Why have you been avoiding me?"

"I just thought...look you made it pretty clear what you thought about our relationship so what more is there to say?" Steve shrugged in defeat.

"What more is there to say? What more is there to SAY?!" Nancy said, "We have a lot to talk about Steve, but you were just gone."

"Well you told me our relationship was bullshit, you disappeared then reappeared with Jonathon, and a lot of crazy supernatural shit happened yet again. So based on that I kind of figured that we were over and you were with Jonathon or something." Steve said looking away uncomfortably and shoving his hands in his pockets.

There was a long pause. Steve didn't look up just kept staring down at his shoes. "Steve," Nancy said softly, "I didn't....I don't.... You assumed a lot."

Steve felt another pang of anger, the same anger he'd felt earlier with Jonathon in his car. "What does that even mean Nancy?! All I wanted was to keep us safe, to keep the person I love safe but apparently that was bullshit! I know how you feel about Jonathon. I see the way you look at him and how you smile when he's around. So like I said I assumed we weren't together."

Nancy shifted balling her fists up looking like she was going to cry, "I don't know! I don't know! I just know I still have feelings for you."

"But do you have feelings for Jonathon?" Steve knew the answer but asked anyway.

"I...yes."

Steve felt like his heart was breaking. He could deal with her just breaking up with him. That way he could move on, resign himself to knowing it was over but it wasn't. This was Nancy still having feelings for him and for Jonathon. This was just the worst. No one could end up happy in this situation.

For a while they stood there in silence, both of them contemplating where this left them. Nancy put a hand on his arm, "I'm sorry." She whispered.

Steve took her hand and held it between his, "Yeah." He sighed.

"Our relationship wasn't bullshit. It isn't bullshit. I was just-I needed Barb's parents to know-I just thought you didn't care but then you protected Mike and all the kids and...I'm sorry."

"No it's...I understand why you thought I didn't care. But I just wanted to protect you." Steve explained.

"Yeah. Thank you Steve."

"Where does this leave us?" Steve asked.

“I don’t know,” Nancy confessed, “I guess it’s complicated?”

Steve nodded. “And with Jonathon?”

“It’s complicated?” Nancy repeated hesitantly.

Steve didn’t answer just nodded. He didn’t know how to feel about this. His reactions were actually surprising to him. He thought he’d be more upset about Jonathon Byers having a complicated relationship with his...well it was complicated, but mostly Steve kept thinking about both of their faces when they were together and how it would be a tragedy to tear them away from each other.

Generally when one has had to deal with vicious flesh eating monsters and their relationship slowly crumbling they don’t do their photography homework. So on the day that Steve was supposed to come to class with a roll of film done he showed up with nothing. He cursed silently at himself for forgetting and not taking a single photo.

When everyone started getting ready to develop their film Steve tried to make himself as small and unnoticeable as possible. He shrunk down in his seat. Eventually the teacher walked up to him, crossed her arms, and sighed.

“Steven this is the second assignment you’ve missed. I would absolutely hate to fail you in this class.” She said.

“Sorry.” Steve sunk lower in his seat.

“Is there anything in particular that you’re having trouble with?” The teacher asked but Steve was distracted by Jonathon walking in and sitting his things down in the back corner. Steve had forgotten that Jonathon sometimes came in to develop his film during his free period. Jonathon caught him staring, a smile brushed his lips and Steve was pulled out of his reverie.

“Steven? Are you listening to me?” Mrs. Dixon asked clearly becoming frustrated.

“Uh yeah sorry. No I’m-the camera isn’t the problem.” Steve

shrugged. To be honest there just wasn't anything he wanted to take pictures of. Everything was the same in Hawkins. It all blurred together in a gray mass, one cloudy shape bleeding into the next.

"Look Steve I need you to start taking these assignments seriously. I'll give you a week extension on this and that's it."

"Okay. Thanks." Steve sighed feeling slightly relieved he wouldn't entirely fail the class. He had a week to figure out what to shoot. Surely that was plenty of time to come up with some inspiration.

"Uh hey." At some point Jonathon had come up behind him and Steve jumped.

"Holy-god you scared the shit out of me." Steve cursed. Jonathon looked equally surprised at Steve's outburst and had his hands raised in surrender.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to scary you. I just heard your conversation with Mrs. Dixon."

"Ah yeah so now you know how great I am at photography." Steve said sarcastically rolling his eyes and tipping his chair back in an attempt to look nonplussed.

Jonathon tugged at the sleeves of his sweater and ran a hand through his hair uncomfortably. "Well if you want some help I can give you some tips." He offered ignoring Steve's sarcastic commentary.

Steve straightened up intrigued. Why would Jonathon be offering him help? This was probably some attempt to look good for Nancy. There was no way that Jonathon would want to hang out with Steve for no reason. He wanted to tell Jonathon to go fuck himself and stop trying to get to him but his curiosity won out.

"....Sure. I guess." Steve didn't really know how else to respond to this strange offer.

Jonathon seemed to brighten up slightly, looking less self-conscious. "Oh great!" he was clearly surprised Steve had agreed, "Well I don't have any plans after school today. Would you want to come over to my place? I have a bunch of photos I can show you and some really

old cameras I found at some thrift stores. I mean I don't know if they work but..." he seemed to notice that he'd started rambling and Steve's grin had grown wider as he talked.

Steve laughed, "Yeah sounds rad."

Jonathon smiled, "Great. I'll see you then."

Steve was confused by the fluttering he felt in his stomach when Jonathon had smiled and gotten lost in his words. He was probably just confused by the strangeness of the situation they were in. Yeah that was definitely it.

2. Chapter 2

Summary for the Chapter:

In which Jonathan teaches Steve about photography but Steve seems to only take good pictures of Jonathan and Nancy.

Steve pulled up to Jonathan's house after school. He took a deep breath. He didn't know why he was so nervous, the same butterfly feeling he'd felt in photography class earlier that day came back. This was weird wasn't it? Most people didn't go to their it's-complicated-maybe-girlfriend's maybe boyfriend's house. Wow that was complicated. Yep it was definitely weird. Steve shook his head trying to clear his thoughts. He was a cool guy he could definitely make this not weird.

Steve got out of the car, slicked his hair back, and walked up to the door hesitating slightly before knocking. He'd fully expected Joyce Byers to answer but when the door swung open there was Jonathan looking nervous. For a moment Steve was distracted by the unmistakable similarities between Joyce and Jonathan. They both stood shoulders slightly hunched, eyes sharp darting around looking for signs of danger, poised to run or fight at any moment. Steve wondered if anxiety was hereditary.

"Hi." Jonathan said smiling slightly moving out of the doorway to let Steve in.

"Hey." Steve said as he stepped into the Byers house but was quickly stunned by the memories the house brought back. The whole place was full of small landmarks, reminders of everything that had happened. The front window that had a demidog thrown through it, the small pieces of tape left on the walls from the map Will had drawn, the spot in the hallway that he, Jonathan, and Nancy had trapped the demigorgon in. Steve hoped that Jonathan was okay living in this weird supernatural magnet house after everything that happened.

Jonathan seemed to notice Steve looking around, taking in all the

memories. “Yeah it’s weird right? It’s like when I’m at school or gone nothing actually happened, but then every time I walk back in that door it all comes back.”

Steve stopped looking around at the small terrors the house contained and focused on Jonathan. He held his arms around himself and seemed distant, as if he had drifted out of his body and left a statue standing next to Steve. After a moment he shook his head and looked back at Steve.

“Anyway uh come on in.” Jonathan gestured Steve to follow him further into the house leading him to his room.

Jonathan’s room was a mixture of band posters and photography. Clothes and books were scattered around the room but seemed to have but put there purposefully, an organized mess. Steve took a seat in the chair at the desk as Jonathan rummaged around a chest of drawers until he found what he was looking for with a quiet “ah-ha!” He pulled out a small square cardboard box and placed it on his bed.

He opened it and rifled through a few photos muttering to himself.

“Man I didn’t realize photography involved so much talking to yourself.” Steve said nonchalantly, smiling and spinning lazily in the chair.

Jonathan made a face, still focused on the photos, “Yeah well it does. That’s the first thing you have to master before you can take a good picture. Oh this is a good one,” Jonathan said finally looking up holding a photo up, “This is one I took last year. I really like the composition of this one.”

Steve stopped spinning and sat opposite of Jonathan on the bed. The picture was dark, a figure stood on the side of a gravel road just in the light of a street lamp. The rest of the picture tapered off into black.

“Wow. Are all of your photos this dark and creepy?” Steve asked and reached in to look at some of the pictures out of the box.

Jonathan quickly grabbed them out of Steve’s hand. His face was

bright red.

“Woah sorry I didn’t mean to-“ Steve started.

“No no it’s fine-it’s,” Jonathan paused for a moment running his hand through his hair, “It’s just that I don’t really ever show people my photos so...”

Steve was taken aback by the fact that Jonathan had even invited him over if that was the case and wondered how he’d earned his trust. Steve held his hands up in surrender, “It’s cool man. I won’t grab anymore photos.”

“Here,” Jonathan handed Steve the photos he’d taken from the box, “You can look at them. I need to get better at showing people my work anyway. Why not start now.”

Steve smiled, “I promise that I’ll be impressed! I mean have you seen my photos?!”

“Uh no.” Jonathan said confused.

Steve laughed, “Exactly! That’s because I haven’t taken any so yours are sure to be better than mine. Also come on these are really great... dark and fucking creepy but awesome.”

Jonathan had crossed his arms and looked away as Steve talked, “uh thanks.” He said looking self-conscious.

As Steve looked through the stack of pictures Jonathan put on some music and started pacing and glancing at Steve every once in awhile to judge his reactions.

Steve started noticing similarities between each photo (not that it was very difficult.) Each of them was dark. Most of them were taken at night, the subject either facing away or shadowed. In some of them the subject looked almost menacing. All of the images were striking. Steve could tell that Jonathan had an eye for this stuff. He was good. Steve glanced up at Jonathan who was looking at him expectantly.

“So?” Jonathan asked after Steve paused a moment.

"It's amazing." Steve said looking back at the photos, "How did you get so good at this?"

"I don't really know. My dad got me a camera right before he left us. I think it was his apology, thought that I wouldn't hate him if he got me something so nice. But anyway I started taking pictures and I just kept going. They weren't good at first but eventually I found my style you know?" Jonathan said.

"Hmm and your style is...scary, creepy people in the woods." Steve pointed out.

Jonathan chuckled, "Yeah. I don't know...sometimes I take pictures of happier things but they just don't turn out as good."

Steve flipped one of the pictures over and looked at the date Jonathan had written on it. He'd noticed that each picture had a date hand printed on the back. The ones dated from before Will disappeared were all happy pictures. After that date though they'd all taken a sharp turn bathed in darkness. Steve didn't say anything, afraid of stirring up past traumas.

"How do you know what to take pictures of?" Steve asked leaning back on the bed. Jonathan's pacing had slowed a little.

"Well you take pictures of what you know. You find someone or something that inspires you or makes you feel something and then it kind of just branches off from there." Jonathan said.

"Hmm." Steve murmured remembering that Jonathan had taken pictures of Nancy and Steve had broken his camera over it. He felt a flare of anger and then sadness. Jonathan had probably taken pictures of Nancy some time after that too. They were friends and Jonathan was clearly into her so of course he did.

"So Nancy makes you feel something?" he said in a slightly annoyed tone.

Jonathan stopped and looked at Steve confused, "Are you really talking about something that happened a year ago?" he asked.

Steve shook his head, "No-I mean yeah but....I don't know what I'm

talking about. I guess that one time but you and Nance clearly sorted that out, plus there was that fight after..."

"The one where you broke my camera?" Jonathan asked bluntly.

Steve winced, "Yeah that one. I am sorry about that by the way I was just doing what I thought was right to stand up for Nancy but I got carried away."

Jonathan nodded, "No. I deserved it man I shouldn't have taken those pictures. Anyway I know you're sorry because Nancy told me your secret."

Steve looked up at Jonathan confused. Sure everyone had secrets at some point but he honest to god couldn't think of one that Nancy would know or tell Jonathan.

Jonathan was smiling at Steve clearly enjoying his confusion, "She told me that getting me a new camera for Christmas was your idea and that you paid for it and wrapped it and everything."

"Oh yeah that..." Steve fell back on the bed and stared at the ceiling so Jonathan couldn't see the blush that spread across his face, "Merry Christmas."

Jonathan laughed. Steve smiled.

For a while Steve looked through Jonathan's photos stopping every so often to compliment one or ask a question about another. Jonathan lay sprawled out on one side of the bed air drumming and singing quietly to music that he put on. Sometimes a song would come on and his lips would turn down slightly in a half frown and he'd get up with a sigh to change it.

There was something intriguing about the way he moved, the way Steve could tell which part of the song was his favorite by the small movements he made with his hands and the faint smile that brushed his lips as he sang along. Steve reached down, pulled his camera out of his bag, and lazily took a picture of Jonathan who had his eyes closed and was tapping his fingers on his legs to the beat singing softly. When the click of the shutter went off his eyes fluttered open

slowly.

“Who’s creepy now?” Jonathan asked with a mischievous smile.

Steve rolled his eyes and laughed, “Guilty as charged.” He snapped another photo of Jonathan as he was turning toward him slightly, laughing.

They stayed like that for another few hours until Joyce and Will got home and Steve excused himself wishing them a good evening and promising Jonathan he’d show him the pictures he took. He smiled as he headed out to his car.

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The next day Steve used his free period to go to the library and look up books on photography. He had plenty of math homework to do but that was a class he knew he’d get a C in anyway and damn if he wasn’t determined to get better at photography.

When he’d first walked in the librarian had looked at him confused considering he was almost never here, especially during a free period. She quickly composed herself and smiled at him nodding an acknowledgement. Sure Steve occasionally broke some (ridiculous) rules and pulled a few pranks but he’d never given any of the school administrators any reason to not trust him.

The photography section of the library was surprisingly large, spanning two long shelves of books. The range of topics was so vast that he didn’t even know where to start. What did he know? What didn’t he know? What did he need to know? He massaged his temples. He already had a headache.

He settled on a few introductory books and decided he’d just read the sections he didn’t know much about and work his way on from there. After a few chapters on the mechanics of cameras that made no sense to him, Steve closed the book and laid his head on the table with a loud sigh that got him a few dirty looks and a “shhh.”

“Wow. Steve Harrington, reading...who would have thought.” Came a soft voice from above him.

Steve looked up and saw Nancy standing with an armful of books looking amused, "Had to happen at some point. I do want to graduate you know."

"And photography is the class you need to study for?" Nancy asked eyebrows raised.

Steve paused, "Sure. It's a hard class when you're awful at photography...and never turn in your homework." Nancy laughed, "Oh uh would you like to join me?" he asked pulling out the chair beside him and holding out his hand to take her books.

Nancy stopped for a moment and looked like she was about to reject him but then smiled and nodded, "I'd like that." She said handing her books over to Steve and setting down the messenger bag she'd been carrying with her.

They worked in silence for awhile, Steve reading and occasionally taking a few notes, Nancy doing physics homework. Steve looked over at her occasionally and each time her face was scrunched up in obvious annoyance.

"Hey Nance relaaaax. You can't physically fight homework I promise." Steve said leaning back in his chair and stretching.

"Oh! I was doing that thing wasn't I?" Nancy asked brushing her hair back nervously and looking embarrassed.

Steve smiled, "Yeah you were. I waited to tell you until you looked like you were about to explode."

Nancy laughed, "Well physics makes me want to explode! I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing. How's your photography researching going?" she asked nodding towards the pile of books he had on the desk.

"Ugh. It's....not great." Steve confessed. There's just so much and I understand how to take a picture and how a camera works I just can't seem to find anything to take pictures of.

"Well come on Steve," Nancy laughed and Steve looked at her confused, "Photography is an art! You can't just learn art from a

book. Sure you can learn the basic technical parts but the actual art is up to you.” She explained.

“Ugh,” Steve groaned, “I’m so bad at this!”

“No, you just haven’t taken enough photos yet. How are you supposed to know your style if you never actually take photos?” Nancy asked as she leaned over and closed the book in front of him, “Just put the books back and take pictures.”

“Of what?” Steve asked frustrated.

Nancy shrugged, “Of anything.”

They stayed in the library a little while longer. Nancy started making a face again while she was studying and Steve smiled. He took his camera from out of his bag and snapped a picture. Nancy distractedly looked up at him and smiled knowingly.

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Steve took Nancy’s advice to heart. He’d taken pictures of anything that looked moderately interesting. His car, a broken bike that someone had left on the side of the road, and the few he’d taken of Jonathan and Nancy. When his photography class had come along the next week he had shown a surprised photography teacher that he did indeed care enough about the class (and more importantly graduating) that he’d put in an effort.

After he’d developed the film he fought with the enlarger thankful that the low red lighting made it difficult for his classmates to see him struggle. As he was developing his pictures he realized that most of them were absolute shit and the more shitty pictures he developed the more self-conscious he felt. He looked at the girl’s picture beside him. Ugh it was good. Damn it. Couldn’t there be at least one other shitty photographer in this class?!

At the end of the class Steve put the pictures he’d developed into a folder, scribbled his name on the front, and dropped it on the teachers desk with a scowl. As he was putting his books back in his backpack he folded up two extra pictures he’d developed, one of

Nancy and one of Jonathan. They were the only picture's he was really proud of.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hope you all like this chapter!

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

If he wasn't going to stop thinking about Jonathan when he was mostly sober then he was gonna get wasted! Kind of hard to think about people when you're black out drunk he supposed.

Notes for the Chapter:

In which Steve is absolutely confused but alcohol can fix all of his problems.

Trigger warning for internalized homophobia/slurs

After dealing with a bunch of supernatural shit it was pretty hard for Steve to sleep. The first week after everything had happened he'd been able to sleep but was plagued by horrifyingly realistic night terrors that he couldn't wake up from. The second week was when the insomnia set in. At first he'd tried just laying in bed waiting for sleep to come. That had quickly proven ineffective. The second thing he'd tried was meditation but yet again the result was no sleep and a frustrated Steve.

In fact there was only really one thing that actually worked as far as Steve could tell and that wasn't exactly a readily available method. On the nights that Steve's parents went out and left him home alone for the night he was able to jack some of their alcohol and get absolutely drunk. His parent's had a shit ton of alcohol in the house so he wasn't worried about them noticing his occasional theft but he didn't dare to do it too much and never when they were in the house. A lot of the time he'd steal the alcohol and save it for the bad nights, the ones where he knows he won't get to sleep at all but was absolutely exhausted. Last night was one of those nights.

The only negative side of his insomnia cure was having to go to school with a horrible fucking hangover. So that's how he ended up in the school parking lot 30 minutes late to his first class wishing he could go home and sleep. In fact he'd already decided that instead of eating during lunch he was going to come out to his car and take a

quick nap. He definitely needed sleep over food right now.

Steve quickly found out he wasn't the only tired one once he saw Jonathon in the hall just before lunch. He had dark circles under his eyes and looked like he could fall asleep standing up at his locker. Steve felt a pang of sadness. He knew Jonathon had to also be dealing with night terrors and insomnia. After everything he and his family had been through he definitely didn't need that added factor to his life.

Steve's breath caught in his throat and he quickly looked away as Jonathon looked up and caught his eye. Steve pretended to be organizing his locker hoping that Jonathon hadn't noticed his outright stare. A few seconds later though Steve felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned around to see Jonathon standing there awkwardly a weak smile on his face.

"Oh uh hey man," Steve managed to choke out awkwardly trying to act like he hadn't just been caught staring, "What's going on?"

"Did you still wanna show me those photos you developed the other day?" Jonathon asked shifting uncomfortably from side to side, eyes darting around.

"Ah fuck!" Steve forgot that he'd planned to show Jonathon those photos on their lunch break, "I forgot we were doing that. I've been kind of out of it lately...the photos are in my car if you wanna go out there with me."

Jonathon shrugged, "Sure."

By the time the boys had reached Steve's car Steve was already tired again and he sighed in relief when he slipped into the cars backseat. Man sitting down really felt good. He could just stay here the rest of the day he thought as he laid down, closing his eyes.

"Ummm," He jerked up eyes open when he was reminded that Jonathon was there, "You can take a nap now and show me those pictures after school if you want man." Jonathon said looking down

at Steve struggling to sit upright again.

“Ah no it’s okay I’d rather just get it out of the way now I’m sure I’ll be even more tired by the time school’s over.” Steve said sliding into the other seat and motioning for Jonathon to join him in the car.

After Jonathon had slipped into the seat next to him Steve fished around under the passenger seat trying to find the folder the photos were in. He knew that he’d thrown in back here at some point.

“A-ha!” he exclaimed after finding what he was looking for, “The photos! Just...be warned they’re pretty goddamn rough.” He said handing over the folder.

The two sat in silence while Jonathan looked over the photos occasionally making approving or disapproving noises. Steve felt like he was slowly melting from anxiety sitting there listening to the noises coming from Jonathon. Were they good? Were they bad? Did Jonathon think he had no talent? Steve felt like he was going to explode.

“Okay okay okay! I can’t take it anymore!” Steve nearly shouted, “Are they good? Are they bad? What do the noises you’re making mean?!”

Steve immediately felt bad hoping he hadn’t frightened Jonathan but was quickly confused when he saw Jonathan smirking at him looking immensely amused.

“....uh... I mean...” Steve stumbled. He didn’t know how to take Jonathan’s response.

Jonathan stayed silent for a few moments later still looking amused before he burst out laughing.

“Hey!” Steve muttered folding his arms over his chest defensively, “Are you laughing at me?”

Jonathan’s response was to just laugh harder, “No no no I’m sorry.” He finally got out between laughs, “I just-I just did not expect that to be your reaction. You’re always so sure of yourself and to see you so flustered was hilarious!”

"I am not flustered!" Steve argued a blush creeping across his cheeks.

Jonathan leaned in slightly closer with a mischievous smirk, "It's good to know I can make Steve Harrington nervous."

Steve opened his mouth to say something but found he couldn't speak so he sat there gawking, his blush becoming a deeper red. He was thankful that Jonathan had turned his attention back to the photos and was flipping through them.

He stopped at one dull photo of a car in front of the movie theater and pointed at it. "Okay so this one isn't the best because you have no contrast and your composition is boring. It could have been a cool picture if you'd have just taken it at another angle."

Steve nodded trying to refocus his attention from Jonathan onto the photos. Jonathan kept flipping through the photos and stopped on the photo of Nancy. It was one of Steve's favorites. In the photo she was framed by one of the big windows in the library. She sat leaning over a book, her eyes intensely focused, her face scrunched up in that cute way it does when she's studying. Steve felt a fluttering in his stomach. She was so beautiful, so intelligent, and so unlike him, maybe the complete opposite of him. He felt his heart drop. Maybe that was why they weren't together anymore. Jonathan and Nancy certainly had more in common than he and Nancy did. God he missed her.

Steve looked over at Jonathan who had also been staring at the photo. He had the same look in his eyes that Steve did while looking at the picture. He expected a feeling of jealousy or anger to follow. Of course it was only natural for someone to be jealous in this kind of situation. That feeling never came though and Steve was left feeling slightly confused.

Jonathan looked up and realized Steve was staring at him and cleared his throat, "Uh this picture has really good framing and composition see. That's what you'd missed in that other photo."

"Oh yeah okay." Steve said awkwardly observing Jonathan from the corner of his eye when he started flipping through the photos again. Jonathan paused on the picture of him stretched out on his bed, eyes

closed, drumming in the air to some distant tune.

“Ha I forgot you took this!” Jonathan laughed plucking it out of the stack of photos, “This is a pretty great picture of me.” He smiled.

Steve could feel the blush creeping back onto his cheeks and he shifted in his seat awkwardly. He was so glad that Jonathan was still looking at the picture and not him. He suddenly felt trapped in the car, like he’d stripped away some emotional layer of himself and if Jonathan were to just look up he’d see Steve’s deepest secrets.

Jonathan looked through a few more pictures before Steve finally decided he couldn’t sit in this feeling anymore. He needed to get out of the car and run as fast as he could from Jonathan.

“Hey man we’d better get back. Lunch period is almost over.” Steve said.

“Yeah good idea.” Jonathan said handing the photos back to him with a smile, “These were really good. You’re definitely not going to fail photography.” He said opening the door.

“Thanks. Uh you go ahead without me I think I left my math homework in here too.” Steve said trying to act calm.

“Sure. See you later.” Jonathan said waving as he turned to walk back into the school.

Steve took a deep, shaky breath as he watched Jonathan walk away, trying not to think about what it meant that when he saw that picture of Jonathan he’d felt the same butterfly feeling when he’d looked at the picture of Nancy.

Steve had debated whether or not he should just skip the rest of the school day or if he should go back in and attend his afternoon classes. He knew that even if he did go back in he wouldn’t be able to focus anyway. Then again he did need to get decent enough grades to maybe go to college. In the end he’d decided on just sucking it up and going to class. So he found himself in biology class zoning out completely.

What did any of this mean? He understood the feeling he got while looking at the picture of Nancy. He felt butterflies in his stomach, a deep affection, happiness. Nancy was smart, and beautiful, and kind, of course he would have feelings for Nancy. Steve understood all of those feelings. They made sense. But then...there was the problem of the photo of Jonathan. That one completely baffled Steve. He'd felt the same butterflies, the same affection, the same happiness. He supposed Jonathan was also a good, if not strange, looking guy. His cheekbones were well defined, his body lean and muscular. Steve had seen his muscles when he wore a tshirt but he was sure that he had well defined muscles under that shirt too.

STOP! Steve shook his head quickly balling his hands in his hair and pulling. No no no absolutely not. He wasn't actually thinking about Jonathan fucking Byers' abs in the middle of biology class (or ever for that matter.) He wasn't a fucking faggot! He wasn't a faggot. He couldn't be. Steve felt his body flood with shame. How could he even be thinking about things like this?! He was a normal guy who liked girls and only girls.

Steve breathed a sigh of relief. That's right he did like girls and if he liked girls then there was no way he could be a fairy! He chuckled silently to himself. He was getting freaked out for nothing. Steve shook his head and went back to trying to focus on the lecture but the whole time he felt a deep shame settling over him.

That afternoon Steve got home from school and went straight to his room. He'd been able to shake off the thoughts for awhile at school but the shame stayed with him. He just wanted to be alone to try to sort things out. This new problem was driving him crazy. Damn he just wanted to get super fucking drunk. Remembering he'd been saving up a bunch of alcohol Steve reached under his bed and pulled out the box he'd used to hide it. Ah yes. Tequila would definitely solve this! But he supposed he'd have to wait until after his parents went to bed before he could drink it.

Much to Steve's luck about an hour later he heard his father calling him.

"Steve bud your mother and I are going out to dinner. We left money

for a pizza for you.” He yelled up the stairs.

Steve cheered internally. Fuck yes! He’d forgotten it was Friday night, which meant his parents went out to dinner with friends, “Okay thanks dad!” Steve yelled back.

After he’d ordered a pizza Steve decided it was more than time to start drinking. He supposed shots were the quickest way to get fucked up so that’s what he did. Three shots in a row then a coke with tequila. He was gonna be soooooo fucked.

Thankfully Steve was still slightly sober when the pizza delivery guy came. He scarfed the pizza as fast as he could and washed it down with more alcohol. Why had he decided to get drunk again? He couldn’t remember he just knew everything felt so good. This was amazing! Why didn’t everyone do this always? Why had he done this again? Oh right...the gay thing.

Steve’s mood immediately dropped. He’d been sky high enjoying the effects of the alcohol and now there was the shame again. Another shot should do the trick. Now that he was thinking about it though he couldn’t stop. He went to his room and picked up the folder he’d kept his photos in. He took out the one of Nancy and the one of Jonathan and held them side by side. Hmmm which one would he choose. Which one did he find attractive that would decide if he was straight or gay. He held the photos there for awhile eyes darting back and forth between the two. He groaned in frustration. This was impossible!

“You just need to focus more.” He thought to himself. Yeah focus. He shifted his gaze to the picture of Nancy. He smiled. She was amazing and looked so beautiful in the picture. It was the picture he’d taken of her leaning over a textbook in the library. She was doing that stupid face she did when she was studying or being serious. Her hair cascaded down her shoulders and partially covered her face. She had one hand holding open a page in the textbook and another raised holding a pen. She looked so effortlessly beautiful and intelligent it almost took Steve’s breath away. Yeah Steve was definitely straight.

But he had to look at the picture of Jonathan now too. It was only fair. Nothing would come of it he was sure because he’d just proved

to himself he was straight. He shifted his focus to the picture of Jonathan. The picture was taken when Steve had gone over to his house for the first time (well the first time to hang out and not fight monsters from another dimension.) Jonathan lay on his bed, eyes half closed, arms raised drumming to a beat. Steve remembered how Jonathan had become lost in the music; it was almost like he'd forgotten Steve was there. Steve felt a pang of...he wasn't sure how to identify the emotion. He supposed he should be honored that Jonathan had let down his guard around him. He smiled remembering how Jonathan had thrown himself down on the bed ignoring everything that was around him, fully emerged in the music, not snapping out of it until Steve had taken an opportune picture.

Steve went back to focusing on the picture, specifically on Jonathan's physical appearance. He still felt like his initial conclusion had been accurate. Jonathan was attractive in the weirdest way possible. He'd probably be even more attractive if he just cut his hair a little different. Jonathan looked particularly good in the picture Steve had taken. He lay languid on his bed, eyes half closed, mouth slightly parted probably singing along to whatever song had been on at the time. Steve didn't even notice when he'd started wondering what was under Jonathan's shirt and what it would be like to be on top of him on that bed.

No! Fuck, again! Steve couldn't believe his plan hadn't worked because now he assumed he had to be gay! His test was supposed to prove his straightness but he was still just as confused as before he'd done that exercise. Fuck it he decided he may as well take some more shots. If he wasn't going to stop thinking about Jonathan when he was mostly sober then he was gonna get wasted! Kind of hard to think about people when you're black out drunk he supposed.

By the time his parents got back Steve knew he was extremely drunk. He wasn't blackout quite yet but pretty fucking close. His parents usually just left him alone when they got back from Friday night dinners which Steve was thankful for especially now with him in this state. An hour after his parents had returned Steve decided it would be a great idea to just call Jonathan and confront his problem. He snuck downstairs avoiding the squeaky step on the staircase and made his way to the living room. He dialed Jonathan's number trying

not to giggle as it rang.

“Ummm hello?” Steve was so happy it was Jonathan’s voice on the other line. He’d worried he’d get Joyce and she’d be able to tell he was drunk.

“Jonnnonn’t hn! Hi!” Steve slurred excitedly.

“Who- Steve? Is that you?” Jonathan asked confused.

“Yeeaaaaah! Wow I can’t believe you remember what my voice sounds like that’s pretty cool man wow.” Steve said almost tearing up because of how happy he was over the fact that Jonathan knew it was him.

“Yeah buddy...are you feeling okay man?” Jonathan asked concern in his voice.

“Oh yeah Johnny don’ worry bout me I jus’ had a lil bit of alcohol is all.” Steve explained.

“Oh uh okay. Well be safe man don’t drink too much it sounds like you’re pretty drunk.” Jonathan warned.

“Oh yeah I’m drink’n water n shit don’ worry!” he reassured him.

“That’s good. So..uh...why’d you call me?” Jonathan asked.

Steve had forgotten it was in fact him who had called, “Ooooooh yeah that! I just called to tell you thaaaaaaat... you’re really cool...and nice and smart and hot and I really care about you!” It all came out in a drunken rush.

There was silence on the other end for a few minutes and Steve’s heart broke. He should have known that he’d fuck everything up.

“I care about you too man.” Jonathan said breaking the silence.

“You do?!” Steve asked.

“Um yeah of course. Look are you feeling okay?” he asked.

“Mhhhhmmmm I’m just....” he trailed off. What was he? How would he

even begin to describe how he was feeling, freaked out? Horrified? Why had he even called Jonathan in the first place this was such a bad idea.

“Steve?” Jonathan said, “Are you still there?”

“Oh yeah sorry I’m just... I gotta go. Sorry I called you so late.” Steve hung up before Jonathan could answer. Maybe he should call Nancy? That would balance all of this out right? If he called Nancy he’d remember why he liked her and why he was definitely heterosexual. Yeah, yeah call Nancy! Steve was brilliant!

He drunkenly dialed her number this time feeling more anxious than when he was calling Jonathan. Before it seemed like all these calls were a good idea and would help him figure this whole mess out, but now...well now it seemed like a not so great idea.

“Hello?” A young boys voice answered the phone. Steve assumed it was Mike.

“Um hey can I speak to Nancy? This is Steve.” He said trying not to slur his words.

“Oh hey Steve! Yeah just a second.” Steve heard Mike put the phone down. A minute later he heard someone picking up the phone.

“Steve? Are you okay? It’s kinda late.” Steve smiled at hearing Nancy’s voice.

“Yeah yeah o’ course Nance! I just want’d to hear your voice I guess.” He said. There was silence on the other end, “I’m sorry I’ll go if I’m making you uncomfortable or-“

“No!” Nancy cut him off quickly, “I was just uh...I’ve just been...I miss you.” She finished.

“I miss you too Nance! I miss you so much!” He said and he meant it. He felt like his heart was breaking every single time he remembered they weren’t together anymore. That they’d never kiss again. That he wouldn’t get to see her in her most vulnerable moments when they stayed up late talking about their dreams and hopes and fears. He felt a tear roll down his cheek.

"Maybe you can come over sometime...if you want. We could hang out and I don't know...I just know I miss you." She said hesitantly.

Steve's heart fluttered, "Yeah but would Jonathan be okay with that? You guys are dating aren't you?" he pointed out.

"We're not really- it's- We're not dating we're just- I don't really know everything is so confusing and I don't know what to do." Nancy admitted.

"It's okay Nance. I'm confused too." Steve said. He didn't know how to feel. He was glad that Nancy still wanted a relationship with him on some level. But then there was Jonathan and Steve had no idea how to feel about that. He knew he was supposed to be happy that Nancy and Jonathan weren't a couple. He was supposed to feel triumphant. He was supposed to use this chance to steal Nancy away from Jonathan and then throw it in his face later. But he didn't feel like that. He just felt sad. No one would win in this situation. He imagined Jonathan's face when he found out Nancy was dating Steve again and the feeling of heartbreak he'd face. Steve felt a deep pang of sadness. He never wanted Jonathan to feel like that.

Fuck. Steve realized he was thinking about Jonathan again.

"I'm sorry I'm confusing you." Nancy said quietly thinking it was her not choosing between Jonathan or Steve that was confusing him.

"Oh no Nance you're fine. It's not...It's other things. There's just a lot going on I don't understand."

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"Well have you ever thought you knew yourself and then later realize you're a whole different person than you thought you were?" He asked.

"That's pretty vague." Nancy pointed out.

"Yeah sorry I can't really talk about it." He said, "Look I should go I'm sorry I called you so late. I miss you." Steve said.

"I miss you too." And with that Steve clicked the phone down. That

definitely hadn't helped him figure anything out. All he knew was that he was completely confused and completely fucked.

Author's Note:

I hope this is good. I've never really written fanfic before and haven't taken a creative writing class in forever so this could be shit. Let me know if you like it or want to give me some constructive criticism.